

**[Mrs. Martha L.]**

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NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS 131 W. 110 St. New York

DATE November 9, 1938

SUBJECT TALES:- INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MARTHA L.

1. Date and time of interview

November 9, 1938 1-3 P.M.

2. Place of interview

Informant's rented room.

3. Name and address of informant

Mrs. Martha L. 257 W. 111th St. New York City

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

None. Known to interviewer

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5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

None

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Adequately furnished bedroom in large flat in average middle-class neighborhood.

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FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS 131 W. 110 St. New York

DATE November 9, 1938

SUBJECT TALES:- INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MARTHA L.

1. Ancestry

American Negro.

2. Place and date of birth

New York City 1872

3. Family

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Married daughter who lives elsewhere.

### 4. Places lived in, with dates

New York City all her life.

### 5. Education, with dates

Possibly finished grade school.

### 6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Maid in private home for several years.

### 7. Special skills and interests

Spiritualism (landlady is a spiritualist)

### 8. Community and religious activities

In failing health, but when able she attends Salem Methodist Church

### 9. Description of informant

Tall, thin, pale yellow in color. Powders heavily. Wears hair piled in coils on top of her head. Has sharp, emaciated face, almost witch-like in appearance.

### 10. Other Points gained in interview

None.

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West.

ADDRESS 131 W. 110 St. New York

DATE November 9, 1938

SUBJECT TALES:- INTERVIEW WITH MRS. MARTHA L.

My mother had four sisters, and they all lived in Brooklyn. It was a rule in our family - at least among my mother's people-not to ever strike any of the children. My mother and my aunts always ruled their husbands, and they were very clannish. When they talked about each other and themselves they said the "Harveys". That was my mother's maiden name. Their marriage names didn't count. One day one of my uncle's slapped one of his children. The child's mother wasn't at home and he ran over to one of his aunt's houses and told her that his father had hit him. That aunt gathered her other sisters and they collected at that uncle's house. They fussed at him - the aunts did-and told him he had no business hitting a child. He told them that it was his own child, and that he had a right to hit him if he wanted to. They stayed there fussing and told him they dared him to ever hit that child again. They waited, all of them, until the child's mother came home, and then they started fussing at her for marrying a man who would hit his child. They wound up telling her that she had no business marrying him in the first place. They told her that my grandfather hadn't wanted her to marry him anyhow. They didn't care how bad my poor uncle felt. They were just keeping up the Harvey clannishness, and running each others families.

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You know, a long time ago they didn't embalm people the way they do now. Plenty people used to be buried alive. Like this, now. When I was a little girl, one of my mother's friends died. They used to go and sit up with the body more than they do now. Well, my mother couldn't go sit up with her friend's body, so she took an hour to go to the house to see the body and console with the relatives. She took me and two of my cousins who were about my age. The body was downstairs. My mother had to go upstairs for something - I don't remember what it was now- and the people who were downstairs went up, too. My mother told us to be quiet and stay downstairs.

You know how kids are. We were quiet for a little while, then we got up and started prowling around the room. We went over and looked in the casket. There wasn't any glass over the top the way there is now. But we weren't afraid a bit. It was the first dead person I had ever seen, and I guess I thought she was just sleeping. Well, while we were looking at her, she raised up in the casket - sat up like she was in a chair-and tried to say something to us. Then she fell back down. When my mother came back downstairs, we tried to tell her about it, but she told us to be still. After we got outside, she asked what we had been talking about, and we told her. She said that the woman couldn't have sat up in the casket or said anything to us because she was dead. 'Course when I got old enough to figure things out for myself, I decided that the woman was in a trance.

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111.

I told you my folks lived in Brooklyn. Well, a family come up from the South moved next door to my Aunt Lucy. They seemed like nice folks and were neighborly and quiet. One day the woman from next door - I've forgot her name-came rushing in to my Aunty Lucy. She told her that she had been conjured. Aunt Lucy just laughed and told her that the Harveys didn't believe in conjuring, and that there wasn't any such thing as conjuring. I guess the woman went back home after that.

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Then about a week later, she fell sick in bed. Aunt Lucy went to see her, and the woman told her again that she had been conjured. Aunt Lucy still didn't put any stock in it, and the woman didn't say much to her about it after that. But she kept getting worse. It took her a long time to have a doctor because she kept saying that it wouldn't do any good since she had been conjured. But after the doctor started coming, she didn't seem to get any better. Then, one other time when my Aunt Lucy went to see her, she told Aunt Lucy to look under the back steps when she left to go home. Just to keep her quiet, Aunt Lucy told her alright. And do you know that Aunt Lucy found a little bag like that tobacco comes in under the steps. It was full of something. Aunt Lucy didn't open it to see what it was because she said she didn't want no part of the mess. She took the bag in to the woman. When she showed it to her, she started screaming and carrying on and told Aunt Lucy to take the bag in the kitchen and put it in the stove and burn it. Aunt Lucy did, but she always said she thought it was foolish. When Aunt Lucy got ready to go home, the woman told her to look on her kitchen window and she'd find some little balls-like berries off the waxberry bush-on the window sill. Sure enough, Aunt Lucy did find them, but she always said that the woman next-door 4 had them put there.

The woman started to get better after Aunt Lucy burned that little bag. She swore that she would have died if Aunt Lucy hadn't found that bag and burnt it. Aunt Lucy asked her how she knew it was there, and how she knew those berries would be on her window-sill, and the woman said that she had a feeling they were there. 'Course I don't believe it myself, I guess. But it did seem funny that that bag and those berries were right where she said they were. It looked kind of funny, too, when she started getting well after the bag was burnt. But Aunt Lucy said that she just happened to take a turn for the better right long through there, and after all, she did have a doctor.

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FORM D Extra Comment

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Dorothy West

ADDRESS 131 W. 110th St. New York

DATE November 9, 1938

SUBJECT TALES: [OINTERVIEW?] WITH MRS. MARTHA L.

Mrs. L. (who wished to have her name withheld) appears to have a wealth of interesting stories to tell, but she either stops midway in relating a story or prohibits the use of the story because she says that it might be detrimental to her landlady. The stories which she tells have mostly to do with conjuring and spiritualism. She has indicated that she had a very interesting childhood, and the interviewer will continue to go to see her in an effort to record the stories of her childhood.